

FRANCO-GERMAN RELATIONS 1871-1914

war of 1870, though contrived by Bismarck, was JL begun by Napoleon III, and defeated France had to pay his debts. The military hegemony of Europe passed from Paris to Berlin, but in the moment of victory the Iron Chancellor committed the greatest mistake of his life. After vetoing the annexation of Austrian territory in 1866 and thereby rendering possible a speedy reconciliation, he allowed the soldiers to have their way in 1871. "After this war/" he declared on the morrow of Sedan, " we must expect another aggression, not a durable peace, whatever conditions we impose. France will consider any peace a truce, and will try to avenge her defeat directly she feels strong enough, alone or with allies." Outside France the annexation of Alsace and a portion of Lorraine was generally regarded as the natural punishment of the Power which had declared war and had been beaten. Where is the nation which, with bitter memories like those of the invasions of Louis XIV and Napoleon, would have returned empty-handed from a sanguinary struggle, and would have left in the possession of its defeated enemy rich territories which had formed part of its own vanished empire ? If France had won, she would doubtless have annexed part of the Rhineland. . It is a crime to transfer masses of human beings from one allegiance to another against their will, but amputation is the common practice of conquerors. The peace-makers of 1919 had no title to cast stones at the peace-makers of 1871: both alike built for the day, not for the morrow.

Bismarck was dimly aware of the unwisdom of the settle-

ment which he was called upon to sanction. " I
did not want
too many Frenchmen in my house," he
exclaimed. " Personally I was opposed to the annexation of
Lorraine," he
confessed to a French diplomatist, " but the
military influences
were too strong." His plan, which received 'the
weighty
approval of the Grand Duke of Baden, was to
content himself
with Alsace, to dismantle Metz, and to exact a
larger indemnity;
and it was a calamity for France, for Germany
and for the
world that it was not adopted. Perhaps he
could not have